

Linda Clair
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File 1a – Friday evening discussion

Linda: ... and if you want to be free from your suffering enough, if you're willing to do anything – at least I was. I know that some people say now that you don't need to make effort and there's nothing that you can do to become free, but I disagree. For me I loved and I still love this practice, because the love for this practice and my teachers brought me to a place of truth and a place where there is virtually no fear. I would say nobody wakes up enlightened overnight. Did I answer your question? (Yes.)

Question: So just meditate?

Linda: It's not just meditation, (laughing) there's more to it than that. There needs to be a willingness and a love there, because just meditating can become a little bit cold and hard. For me, being around my teachers really helped to soften the whole thing, and it also inspired me, because I could see there were these people sitting in front of me who I felt were free. I had no idea what freedom was but I wanted what they had, or didn't have.

So there's a lot that you can do. Have you meditated much before? (45 years, Zen) And what do you feel it's done for you?

Question: A lot. I understand perfectly what you mean about not having fear. But I discovered this recently after many years meditating.

Linda: And was it worth it?

Question: Yes, totally.

Question: The exercise of being in your body – at times it seemed to me that there was effort involved and it hurt sometimes, and at other times it seemed the limits were dissolving and there were just sensations there. So my question is, does effort need to be involved in the act of coming back to the body or do you just have to let go?

Linda: From my own experience, it took me a lot of effort for it to become effortless to be in my body, because I had spent so much of my life in my mind, not in my body. And thinking had become a very deeply ingrained habit. So it took a lot of effort to break that habit, and time.

Question: I don't know if this question is right, but sometimes I have a kind of interference of my idea of me. Maybe it's simple, obvious, but sometimes I think I listen too much to this me, me, me.

Linda: The reason I got into this practice was that I was so sick of me. I just couldn't stand being me anymore. It was an incredible amount of work keeping up this façade; and I felt like a fraud. The

thing I noticed about the people who I could see were enlightened was that they were authentic. That's what I wanted, to be able to be real and authentic, and it became more and more urgent as I went along. But I didn't realise when I started how deeply ingrained the mind was. And when I realised that, it was too late to stop. But at times I really did want to stop. But I'm really glad I kept going.

You never find you who you are; that's not really the question. You need to keep reaffirming *where* you are and where your body is. And once you become secure in that realisation, then and only then, can you let go of that attachment to the body. But you need to become so grounded in your body, so secure in your body, that you're able to let go of the mind, of who you think you are. And that is a huge relief.

How are you H.?

Question: I'm good. It is intense again. I feel this every time, at the beginning, I'm so grateful to be here. There's so much fear and apprehension coming here but now that I'm here and doing it I'm just so grateful to be here.

Question: I feel a deep connection to my body usually when I'm moving, walking, doing some activity. Then comes the stillness like with this meditation, but then thoughts start to emerge.

Linda: And that's the reason that we do this. Because it's only when we're still that we can see how busy the mind is. So I would say the thoughts are still going on in the movement but the movement can be a bit distracting, in a way. And the reason that many people are attracted to dancing or exercise is that you do tend to be more in your body when you're doing something like that.

Some people go to quite extreme lengths to be in their body, for example, extreme sports – because sometimes you're in the position of a life-or-death situation and you're forced to be in your body. So with meditation, eventually, you don't even need to meditate to be in your body. You don't need to exercise or do anything in particular to be in your body. Eventually it becomes the natural state.

But the reason that it's good to sit still and close the eyes is that you can see very clearly that movement away from where you are, which is what thinking is. So it doesn't mean that you're not at all still if the mind is busy. The stiller and more grounded in your body you become, the more clearly you see the workings of the mind, that movement. So keeping the body still can be very effective. And it doesn't mean that you don't do exercise and dance and things that you enjoy in your body. But this, in my experience, is the way. It can be much harder to sit still than to move, but it's very, very valuable. So combine the two, I would say.

Eventually you can move very quickly and do anything, but there's not that momentum in the body. There can be this incredible silence and stillness in the movement, and that is very beautiful.

Have you meditated before P.?

Question: Kind of, but I had never realised before how much noise is in my head. It was very surprising. I came with the idea that this would not be that different to what I have done before. But understand that most of the time I am sleeping. It was a realisation.

Linda: It's a bit of shock, isn't it? (Yes!)

So when you start to see that it is possible to do something about it, you find it harder to ignore that noise. In fact, you start to become even more aware of it. And the things that you do, and most of us do, to try and have a break from that noise start to not work anymore. So in a way you're forced to do something about it. But it's the most amazing thing you can do in your life, to have a silent mind and a silent mind and body, and go about your daily life with no intention and no fear.

Question: I'd like to ask a person question.

Linda: All questions are personal.

Question: It's about my work. I feel the need to get your confirmation on this. I feel I need to change my job to a quieter one – maybe triggered by this meditation practice and realising how much energy it takes to be in my job, and how much nicer it would be in a quieter job.

Linda: If you can, without too much stress with money, I would say yes. H. did the same and she never regretted it.

Question: I want to get to a position where I don't have as much responsibility as I have now, although I feel responsibility is something you impose on yourself. I feel in my current job I need to play a role that doesn't benefit me. I don't see a way to change my relationship to my current job so the alternative is to move to a different one.

Linda: So I would say, if you can it would be a good thing to do.

So a big part of this is looking at the roles that you play and how much you identify with certain roles. You can take on unnecessary responsibilities in any role or job, like a mother, a wife, partner, friend.

Question: It's hard for me because I can see how my life spins around the roles I play. And in this job, even if I try to change my role, I can see everyone else pulling me back to where I was.

Linda: Yes, sometimes it's better to make the break. But in some things you have to be strong enough to resist that pull, because when you start to do this practice there's going to be lots of people and situations pulling you away. And you can't really change every situation in your life. So practically with your job maybe it would be better to do something less intense. But also look at your habits in your daily life at home too because that's where usually the deepest habits are, in our relationships with our family and partners.

And when you do start to change they often feel threatened because most people want you to stay how you are now. Most people are very fearful of change because they're dependent on you being this fixed person. When you start to say, "No, I'm not going to do this," a lot of people can feel quite threatened. And that's one of the very difficult things about this practice; you have to keep standing your ground.

But a lot of people, when they do start this practice or get right into it, change the way that they see their work. They often lose some of their passion for their work because most of your passion needs

to be channelled into this. It doesn't mean that your work might not be enjoyable but it becomes more a practical thing to earn money. Maybe that's what you're feeling now because it does sound like quite an intense job.

Question: I'm in intensive care in a hospital so I'd like to move to a quieter place in the same hospital.

Linda: Yes, see if you can. Move to the babies. (laughter)

Question: I love this practice. It's striking the difference between (this and) the classic teaching where you ask, "Who am I?" which in my experience takes you in mental circles. I don't have a question but hope you can talk about this. (laughter)

Linda: Don't get me started. (laughing) Yes, I agree totally.

The question is not, "Who and I," but, "Where am I?" I'd say quite a few people here have practiced self-inquiry at some stage. Initially you can have some sort of "experience," for want of a different word...or delusion. (laughing) True self inquiry happens spontaneously. For me it was very late in the practice where it was a spontaneous, non-verbal inquiry. But in most practices now it becomes an intellectual exercise.

You can't bypass anything. You can't talk your way into this. You can't talk your way out of your suffering. So what I love about this practice, basic Zen practice, is that you stop looking for short cuts. You stop looking for an easy way out. And you start taking responsibility for how you feel. So it's all about the body. And the only way you're going to see your intellect clearly is by being more in your body. I could say a lot about non-dual practices but really what is there to say. (laughing) From what I can see, it doesn't work.

Question: It all depends on your experience; you try different things and sometimes they lead you on, and other times they don't. This resonates with me, having tried different things like mantras that haven't connected with me. Part of the mantra exercise was that someone told me there's a magic to it, but I struggled with that.

Linda: Your body becomes your mantra in this practice. For me, there was an element of magic when I was going through my practice. For me it was magical that there was this possibility of becoming realised and that all I needed was the longing, determination and a body. I didn't want to spend my life following someone; I wasn't interested in that. But with my teachers I would have done anything to please them because I could see that they were in this state that I wanted to be in. So yes, the magic was in the possibility, "Ah, maybe this is possible for me, not just someone else." This practice is magical.

I know some people put down practice but they've just got no idea! I wanted a practice because I wanted it to be possible for me, and part of this realisation is knowing how you got here. So the job of anyone who is realised is to pass on this practice. That is the responsibly, but it actually doesn't feel like a responsibility, it just feels like the natural thing to do.

And in a way it's similar to when you're practicing and you're getting pulled out all the time, because it's not like everything becomes easy, but the challenges become exciting. And that's why I'm here.

It would be much easier to just stay at home. But easy becomes almost, not boring, but challenge is necessary.

But there will always be people who judge you and try to pull you down. In fact it's almost blasphemy these days to say, "I'm enlightened," because a lot of people think that only dead people can be enlightened, not a middle-aged woman living in Australia. I'm getting a bit beyond middle-aged. (laughter) One day I'll say and an old woman but not quite yet. ☺ I don't know if I answered your question. (laughing)

Question: Some people when they've had an awakening experience, describe it as being through grace. That sounds like some sort of discerning power. I don't see how that works.

Linda: Well, I suppose you could say it's grace that you're here, but it's what you do with that grace that's important. It's there for everyone. I could say I met my teacher through grace but that wasn't enough – I had to work. Nothing gets handed to you on a platter, there's no free lunch. My first teacher used to say, "You have to earn this." You need to have a deep, deep respect for this practice and for anyone who is realised.

Lots of people have had awakening experiences but enlightenment is not an experience. It's not something that you feel for a while and then it goes away. In that sense it's like death. You can't decide, "No, I haven't died, I'll come back." That's why so much fear comes up during the practice, because you start to realise that this isn't something that you can come back from. But once you're actually here there's no question of going back and you don't want to go back. But the fear is of the idea of letting go of the known because we think our security is in our experiences, even an awakening experience.

So with realisation it's every step of the way that's important, it's not just the actual realisation that is important, it's how you deal with it. I've seen people who have had very deep realisation – who are very mature – who haven't been grounded enough to cope with that realisation.

So yes, if this resonates with you, do it. That's how I felt, I went, "Ah, this is right, this is real."

Question: Once you reach this state, is it like you stop enjoying the little pleasures of everyday life like things related to the senses like sex, being with friends.? These kinds of experiences pull me and make me think that things are going to be boring otherwise.

Linda: It's a really good question. It's what most of us fear. Your reason for living changes. For me, the pleasures that you were talking about, I used to use as a reason to be, to live. But when you do truly realise why you're here in this body you stop trying to justify your existence by using your senses and sensual pleasures. But it doesn't mean that you don't enjoy sensual pleasures. You don't need to become this celibate monk living in a cave.

The reason I teach as I do, which is non-sectarian, is that I feel, especially for most of us in the west and probably a lot of people in the east, it's an unrealistic way of living. So I would prefer to say, don't make any rules and don't say, "I'm not going to do this, I'm not going to do that." Instead, as you go more deeply into this, there will be certain things you choose not to do. Nobody's going to say don't do them. You will just naturally not be so attracted to doing them.

But once you've got the reason for your existence out of the way, you're free to enjoy things but without looking for this deep meaning in anything, because you know it's just a worldly thing. So the way that you use your senses completely changes. Instead of using them to seek pleasure and avoid pain you see that pleasure is pleasure, pain is pain. So you stop using pleasure to avoid pain. So in that way it's a lot more pure enjoyment of the senses. If you still want to hang out with your friends of course you can, but you might not want to as much. But you never know, you might.

Question: The way I came to this path was through kundalini yoga and I assumed that it had to be hard and strict, and joy disappeared. I isolated and started to judge everyone, even my closest ones. I'm afraid it will happen again. So when you talk about effort and this kind of discipline, something in my mind resists because now I'm assuming if I lost joy in my path I'd have to recalculate.

Linda: There were lots of time in my practice when I didn't feel joy – in fact I felt the opposite – but there was also this underlying excitement there. Discipline does not need to be strict or rigid. It needs to be self-imposed. You need to want to do this to really do it. But it is hard. People don't talk about how hard it is all that much. I suppose because it doesn't sound very attractive. So that's why most people spend their lives just talking about the end result.

But yes, it leads to a state of such deep joy, indescribable joy. But you do have to go through quite a bit for it. But it's not all heavy and serious. There can be a lot of lightness as well.

It becomes strangely attractive because you start to feel every time you do a retreat a big chunk of your ego comes away. But it doesn't mean that you feel better in a sense and sometimes you become even more aware of your suffering. So that's one of the reasons I say don't make any rules, don't be too strict with anything in your life because this is intense enough. So I feel a more balanced approach makes the realisation much more balanced, and deeper. For example: having your everyday life and bringing this into your everyday life. Not being exclusive of anything, saying, "I'm not doing to this, I'm not going to do that, I'm going to be a strict whatever – celibate, vegan, non-smoking, blah, blah."

Question: In fact, my experience is that I'm able to feel more pleasure, practicing Shikantaza meditation. Being aware of my sensations has made more aware of my pleasure also.

Linda: Yes, you become more aware of everything. So there's not the fear of the pleasure ending, which for me was there in an underlying way before, so that you want to grab onto the pleasure so it doesn't stop.

Question: In what way has your mind state has changed after realisation?

Linda: Umm... It doesn't work very well any more. There's no simple answer to that.

There's no fear, so there's no need to think anymore. This isn't about stopping thinking; it's not about destroying the mind. By becoming incredibly grounded in your body you see more and more clearly the futility of thinking, and you start to see that the mind may be clever but it's not intelligent. The real intelligence lies in the body. The mind is really bluffing you, controlling you. *This* is becoming free for the control of the mind. So on realisation you realise that the mind is never going to have that degree of control anymore. But it doesn't mean that it's not there. I feel that as

long as you're in the body there's a residual bit of mind there. But what that does is keep you humble. So it becomes something very beautiful.

There's not this perfect state. As long as you're in the body there's the chance to become deeply – I'll use the word – enlightened. So now in me, most of the time, it's almost impossible to think, whereas before I felt it was impossible not to think. You need to see the mind for what it is – not push it away. This isn't about stopping thinking. It's something much deeper than that. It's getting to the source of the desire to think, and that lies in your body. And that is the most incredible, exciting thing you can do while you're still in your body.

Question: What about the relationship between the teacher and the student.

Linda: For me it was what kept me going. For me it was really, really important. Do you want to ask something more specific?

Question: Is it okay not to have a teacher and experiment on your own?

Linda: No. (laughter) Not in my experience. There are lots of reasons that it's essential for most people to have a teacher – maybe not everyone – especially a teacher who is still in their body. When I was going through my practice I would see my teacher quite regularly, a few times a week. And even then I could become deluded quite quickly. I think everyone underestimates the strength and depth of the mind.

Having this body in front of me that was virtually free from the mind was an inspiration for me and also a deep threat to my mind because when you're sitting in front of a teacher who you trust is realised your mind is continually challenged. And there's also this affirmation that this is possible while you're in the body. For me it also softened the whole the process. For me it was almost – and it's not like this for everyone – it was like a love affair. It was just that he was a representation of this thing that I loved more than anything. As soon as someone dies that very strong possibility dilutes to a degree.

Question: It's such a big subject.

Linda: It is, it's a huge subject.

Question: Maybe a teacher is good for you for a while and it's okay. And then you have to look for somebody else and it's not easy because there are plenty of people acting like teachers but they're not really.

Linda: It's a tricky thing. But as T. was saying before, sometimes you need to go to people like that to realise who *is* a teacher. It doesn't mean that they're not a teacher, they are teaching something. Sometimes you need to see teachers who are not realised to be able to discern teachers who are realised, *if* you want a realised teacher – not everyone does. It's actually much more threatening having a realised teacher than an unrealised teacher.

Question: How do you know if someone is enlightened?

Linda: Often you can feel something resonate in your body; I'm not saying it's going to be something pleasant but you feel something in your body. You can feel an authenticity about them, a silence. You can often feel stirred up around someone who's realised.

One of the first times I met my first teacher – before I saw him as my teacher, I hardly knew him – I was with my partner at the time at my future teacher's house and when we left and drove away I realised I had this pain in my shoulders. It was this very strong tension in my shoulders. I was saying, "Oh, what's wrong with me? My shoulders are really sore." I realised much later it was the energetic effect of being around him. This was before I had any real resonance with him or feeling that he was realised.

Question: I know that in my experience, because I used to say that teachers are not necessary but I quit saying that.

Linda: It took you a little while. (laughing)

Question: You can see the difference when you're in front of a teacher. Sometimes that's for good and other times the teacher is sort of punishing you. (laughter)

Linda: Not deliberately. I used to feel very uncomfortable around my teacher sometimes. (Why?) I feel it's because you don't know where you stand with them because they're just reflecting things back. There're a few reasons. Being around someone like that there starts to be this energetic field. And when I was around my teachers everything would start to intensify. Sometimes I would feel very self-conscious, other times I would feel almost ecstatic. But what it does is start to speed up your conscious. You start to resonate with them and it just speeds things up. And the tension or uncomfortable feelings in the body are just when the energy speeding up meets blocks in the body, or resistance you could call it. But however I felt, I felt more alive, and being alive isn't comfortable.